

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 120715Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9918

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMCONSUL KARACHI

AMCONSUL LAHORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 1550

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: ELECTION REPORT: TWENTY THREE DAYS TO GO

1. SUMMARY: THE PAKISTAN ELECTIONS, WHICH HAD SEEMED AT ONE TIME TO BE SHAPING UP AS THE NON-EVENT OF THE YEAR, ARE TURNING OUT TO BE MUCH MORE EVENTFUL THAN ANTICIPATED. PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE (PNA) DURING PAST WEEK STAGED A NUMBER OF LARGE, ENTHUSIASTIC RALLIES IN PAKISTAN'S MAJOR CITIES AND SIGNS INDICATE A GROWTH OF PNA STRENGTH, ESPECIALLY IN PUNJAB. THE PARTY ISSUED ITS MANIFESTO THIS WEEK AND ITS PLANS CALL FOR THE CAMPAIGN TO MOVE NOW TO THE COUNTRYSIDE AS WELL AS THE URBAN CENTERS. ALTHOUGH THE LEVEL OF CAMPAIGN INVECTIVE CONTINUES TO INCREASE, THE LAW AND ORDER SITUATION REMAINS BASICALLY STABLE, WITH SOME EXCEPTIONS IN KARACHI. STUDENTS HAVE NOT YET PLAYED A PROMINENT ROLE ALTHOUGH A FEW STUDENT PROCESSIONS HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN SOME CITIES.

PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO, REPORTEDLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE UN-CONFIDENTIAL

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ANTICIPATED UPSURGE IN PNA POPULARITY IN PUNJAB, HAS INTENSIFIED HIS CAMPAIGNING. THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN MENTIONED SEVERAL TIMES, USUALLY IN THE CONTEXT OF A GROWING ARGUMENT BETWEEN THE PM AND PNA LUMINARY ASGHAR KHAN OVER WHO DESERVES CREDIT FOR THE MODERNIZATION OF THE PAK AIR FORCE IN THE MID-60S. IN ADDITION TO THE SURPRISING THRUST OF THE PNA IN THE

PUNJAB, CONTESTS IN KARACHI AND A FEW OTHER SIND CONSTITUENCIES ALSO APPEAR TO BE CLOSE. THERE ARE VARIOUS REASONS FOR PNA STRENGTH IN SOME SIND AND PUNJAB CITIES; THESE INCLUDE THE IMPACT OF INFLATION ON URBAN AREAS, THE GREATER CONCENTRATION OF MIDDLE-CLASS "INTELLIGENTSIA" IN THE CITIES, AND GREATER EXPOSURE TO THE MEDIA AND ITS COVERAGE OF ELECTION ACTIVITIES. HOWEVER, TALK OF A PNA UPSET OR EVEN A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO THE PM'S POSITION IS STILL PREMATURE. BHUTTO COMMANDS STRENGTH IN THE RURAL AREAS AND HAS THE ENTIRE APPARATUS OF GOVERNMENT AT HIS DISPOSAL TO ASSIST THE PPP IF NECESSARY. WHAT APPEARS CLEAR NOW IS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS PARTY CAN NO LONGER BE CERTAIN OF THE WIDE MARGIN OF VICTORY THEY EXPECTED TO ACHIEVE EASILY IN THE ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE DISORGANIZATION THAT CHARACTERIZED PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN OPPOSITION POLITICS APPEARS TO HAVE ENDED IN PUNJAB, THE PROVINCE THAT WILL CHOOSE 115 OF THE 200 ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE NEXT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. OPPOSITION LEADERS CONTINUE TO ADDRESS LARGE AND ENTHUSIASTIC RALLIES IN PUNJAB'S CITIES AND TOWNS. MOST IMPORTANT WAS THE RALLY IN LAHORE SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 6, WHERE APPROXIMATELY A QUARTER-MILLION PERSONS GATHERED TO HEAR PNA LEADERS CRITICIZE THE PRIME MINISTER, THE "RULING CLASS" AND GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION. THE SIZE OF THE RALLY, THE MOOD OF THE PEOPLE AND THE SPONTANEITY WITH WHICH PEOPLE FROM THROUGHOUT THE REGION ATTENDED WITHOUT COERCION OR PARTY-SUPPLIED TRANSPORT HAS BEGUN TO EVOKE COMPARISONS

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FROM SOME PAKISTANI OBSERVERS WITH BHUTTO'S 1970 CAMPAIGN.

3. THE PNA HAS BEEN GREATLY BUOYED BY THE RESPONSE TO ITS NO-HOLDS-BARRED CAMPAIGN IN THE PUNJAB CITIES, AND THE PPP SEEMS TO BE RUNNING SCARED IN THE PROVINCE. HOW SUCCESSFUL THE OPPOSITION WILL BE IN TRANSLATING THIS RESPONSE, AND THE EVIDENTLY SERIOUS URBAN DISCONTENT WHICH UNDERLIES IT, INTO SOLID VOTES IS NOT YET CLEAR. BUT COMPETENT POLITICAL OBSERVERS WE HAVE TALKED TO IN LAHORE IN THE LAST COUPLE OF DAYS AGREE THAT AS OF THIS TIME THE PNA SEEMS LIKELY TO WIN THE BULK OF NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCIES THERE AND IN PUNJAB'S SECOND CITY LYALLPUR, UNSEATING AS MANY AS A HALF DOZEN FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL MINISTERS IN THE PROCESS. THE PNA HAS NOT YET CARRIED ITS CAMPAIGN INTO THE RURAL AREAS IN A MEANINGFUL SENSE, AND IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO GAUGE THE EXTENT OF POTENTIAL OPPOSITION STRENGTH IN THE PROVINCE AS A WHOLE. BUT THE RESPONSE

THAT THE PNA'S RAWALPINDI TO LAHORE MOTORCADE EVOKED
LAST WEEKEND IN THE DISTRICTS ALONG THE GRAND TRUNK ROAD,
APPARENTLY REPEATED IN CENTRAL PUNJAB DURING ITS LAHORE
TO MULTAN PROGRESS THIS WEEK, AND A FEW SCATTERED
REPORTS WE HAVE HAD FROM OTHER AREAS, SUGGEST THAT ALL
MAY NOT BE THAT SECURE FOR THE PPP IN THE PROVINCIAL
COUNTRYSIDE EITHER.

4. IN ITS BID TO ATTRACT RURAL SUPPORT TO COMBINE WITH
ITS POPULARITY AMONG URBAN MIDDLE-CLASS INTELLIGENTSIA,
THE PNA THIS WEEK ISSUED ITS MANIFESTO. PREDICTABLE,
THE MANIFESTO EMPHASIZED ISLAMIC VALUES AND PROMISES
SOMETHING FOR JUST ABOUT EVERYONE. THE RURAL SECTOR IS
PROMISED DISTRIBUTION OF UNIRRIGATED ARABLE GOVERNMENT
LAND TO THE LANDLESS, AND AN END TO THE GOVERNMENT
MONOPOLY OVER PURCHASES OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE. WE ARE
POUCHING COPIES OF THIS MANIFESTO TO ADDRESSEES.
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5. OTHER MANIFESTO PROVISIONS WORTH MENTION INCLUDE A
CALL FOR SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE PEOPLE OF KASHMIR,
AND INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY, AND DISAVOWAL OF INVOLVEMENT IN
BIG-POWER RIVALRIES. THIS LAST REQUIRES A WITHDRAWAL
FROM CENTO. FINALLY, THE MANIFESTO PROMISES AN END TO
ALL GOP-SUPPORTED FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMS.

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R 120715Z FEB 77
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9919
INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA
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AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMCONSUL LAHORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 1550

5. RHETORIC AND INVECTIVE WARMED SHARPLY THIS WEEK AS PPP AND PNA CANDIDATES EXCHANGED WARNINGS ABOUT CAMPAIGN VIOLENCE. MOST HOOLIGANISM APPEARS NOW TO BE CONFINED TO KARACHI AND A FEW OTHER CITIES IN SIND WHERE THE OPPOSITION HAS SOME STENGTH. ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL, ASGHAR KHAN HAS WARNED THE PPP TO REFRAIN FROM STRONG ARM TACTICS OR FACE VENGEANCE; THE PRIME MINISTER AND OTHER PPP CANDIDATES HAVE WARNED THE OPPOSITION TO END CAMPAIGN VIOLENCE OR FACE REDRESS. MEANWHILE, AUTHORITIES IN KARACHI HAVE FOUND IT NECESSARY TO BAN UNDER SECTION 144 THE CARRYING OF ARMS FOR THE NEXT TWO MONTHS. ELSEWHERE NO LAW AND ORDER PROBLEMS ARE APPARENT. HOWEVER, THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF OPPEN SPECULATION WHETHER THE KARACHI VIOLENCE WILL SERVE AS A PRETEXT FOR A GENERAL CRACKDOWN ON THE OPPOSITION IF THEY PROVE TOO GREAT A POLITICAL THREAT ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY.

7. STUDENTS ARE STILL NOT PLAYING AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE CAMPAIGN. THOUGH STUDENT PROCESSIONS HAVE OCCURED IN PESHAWAR AND A FEW OTHER CITIES, AS THE STUDENT GROUPS
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SEEMINGLY TEST THE WATERS, NO REPRESSION HAS FOLLOWED THEIR PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS.

8. PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO, LIKE MANY OBSERVERS, IS SAID TO BE SURPRISED ABOUT THE DRAMATIC SURGE IN APPARENT OPPOSITION POPULARITY IN PUNJAB. HE HAS STEPPED UP HIS CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES, AS HAVE OTHER SENIOR PPP FIGURES. THE PM AND HIS COLLEGUES CONTINUE TO HIT HARD AT THE DISPARATE NATURE OF THE PNA'S CONSTITUENT PARTIES AND ALLEGE THAT ITS COMING TO POWER WOULD LEAD TO CHAOS. THEY STRIKE BACK AT THE MORE EXTRAVAGANT PROMISES THE PNA HAS MADE, RIDICULING THE ALLIANCE'S ABILITY TO DELIVER ON SUCH CLAIMS AS A ROLLBACK OF PRICES TO 1970 LEVELS. BUT IN THE PUNJAB, WHERE HE HAS WORKED HARD TO STEM THE PNA TIDE, THE PM HAS REPORTEDLY NOT BEEN ABLE TO REVIVE THE ELECTRICITY AND EXCITEMENT WHICH SURROUNDED HIS SUCCESSFUL 1970 BID THERE, AND THE FACT THAT MOST OF THE SENIOR PUNJABI PPP LEADERS HE HAS CHOSEN ARE THEMSELVES LACKLUSTRE FIGURES DOES NOT HELP THE PARTY CAUSE.

9. FOREIGN POLICY. THE PM HAS FOCUSED HIS OWN ATTACKS

ON PNA LEADER ASGHAR KHAN. THE US HAS BECOME TANGENTIALLY INVOLVED IN THE EXCHANGE OF CHARGES BETWEEN THE TWO MEN. BHUTTO SEEKS TO DISCREDIT ASGHAR KHAN'S LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES BY CLAIMING THAT AMERICAN MILITARY ADVISERS, NOT THE FORMER AIR MARSHAL, WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR PAKISTAN'S "VICTORY" OVER INDIA IN THE 1965. WAR. THERE IS ALSO A WIDESPREAD WHISPERING CAMPAIGN THAT ASGHAR KHAN IS IN THE PAY OF THE AMERICANS.

10. MOST COMPLAINTS OF CAMPAIGN VIOLENCE COME FROM KARACHI, ESPECIALLY FROM PPP EDUCATION MINISTER HAFEEZ PIRZADA. WHILE COMPLAINTS ON BOTH SIDES MAY OR MAY NOT REFLECT ACTUAL ROWDYISM, IN THE CASE OF THE PPP THEY MAY AS WE NOTED EARLIER, ALSO SERVE TO JUSTIFY AN EVENTUAL
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GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN ON THE PNA.

11. ONE OF THE UNEXPECTED STARS OF THIS CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN THE ELECTION COMMISSION. THOUGH THE CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER HAS LONG MAINTAINED THAT HE AND HIS COMMISSION ARE INDEPENDENT OF POLITICS, THAT BODY HAS GONE TO GREAT LENGTHS DURING THIS ELECTION TO PROVE THEIR CLAIM. THE COMMISSION HAS DEBARRED SEVERAL PPP CANDIDATES FROM CONTESTING FOR IRREGULARITIES IN THEIR NOMINATION PAPERS. THE MOST RECENT EXAMPLE OCCURRED IN PESHAWAR, WHERE PPP CANDIDATE GUL MOHAMMED WAS DISQUALIFIED FOR SUCH IRREGULARITIES. HIS DISQUALIFICATION LEAVES ONLY TWO CANDIDATES IN THAT PESHAWAR CONSTITUENCY, ASGHAR KHAN AND QAYYUM MUSLIM LEAGUE CANDIDATE, FORMER CENTRAL MINISTER YUSUF KHAN KHATTAK. ASGHAR KHAN IS REPORTEDLY TRYING TO PERSUADE KHATTAK TO WITHDRAW SO THE FORMER AIR MARSHAL CAN BE ELECTED UNOPPOSED. IN EXCHANGE THE PNA CANDIDATE IN KOHAT WOULD WITHDRAW LEAVING A RACE BETWEEN YUSUF KHATTAK AND HIS PPP BROTHER, RECENT AMBASSADOR TO IRAN ASLAM KHATTAK. IN OTHER DECISIONS, THE ELECTION COMMISSION HAS POINTEDLY ALLOWED OPPOSITION CANDIDATES, WHO CLAIM THEY HAD BEEN INEQUITABLY FORCED OUT OF THE CONTEST, TO REMAIN ACTIVE IN THE ELECTION. NO DECISION HAS YET BEEN REACHED ON THE CLAIM BY PM'S PUTATIVE OPPONENT IN LARKANA THAT HE WAS FORCIBLY PREVENTED FROM FILING.

12. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO MAKE ANY CONCLUSIVE ANALYSES. HOWEVER, OPPOSITION ACTIVISM, ESPECIALLY IN LAHORE, KARACHI, AND THE LARGER CITIES OF PUNJAB AND SIND IS A NEW PHENOMENON. ONE OF THE KEY FACTORS APPEARS TO BE URBAN DISCONTENT WITH INFLATION AND PRICES OF ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES. THIS ISSUE MAY BE TRANSFERRED TO RURAL PUNJAB. THOUGH PRESS TRUST PAPERS THIS WEEK CONTINUED TO GIVE ONLY SCANT COVERAGE TO THE PNA, MEDIA REPORTS HAVE THEIR

GREATEST IMPACT IN THE URBAN AREAS WHERE PAPERS ARE MORE
WIDELY READ. IN PUNJAB, PNA CONSTITUENT PARTY JAMAAT-E-
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ISLAMI (THE BEST-ORGANIZED OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES)
IS STRONGEST IN METROPOLITAN AREAS. URBAN AREAS ALSO
TEND TO BE CENTERS FOR PAKISTANI INTELLIGENTSIA WHO ARE
TRADITIONALLY THE VANGUARD OF OPPOSITION SENTIMENT.

13. IN KARACHI OLD DISPUTES AND RIVALRIES REMAIN: THE
REFUGEE COMMUNITY REMAINS OPPOSED TO THE PPP AND WHAT IT
SEES AS THE PARTY'S PRO-SINDHI POLICIES. THE LANGUAGE
ISSUE OF 1973, WHEN SINDHI WAS CHOSEN AS THE PROVINCIAL
LANGUAGE STILL RANKLES MANY REFUGEES. THROUGHOUT PAKIS-
TAN ANOTHER IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF WHATEVER OPPOSITION
STRENGTH EXISTS IS THE PERSONAL EQUATION. THE PPP HAS
ACQUIRED A REPUTATION FOR CORRUPTION; IN MANY PLACES THE
OPPOSITION CAPITALIZES ON THIS. OPPOSITION CANDIDATES
TEND IN LAHORE TO BE PROSPEROUS LAWYERS WHO HAVE GOOD
CONTACTS AND CAN MOBILIZE SUPPORT. BUSINESSMEN IN
LAHORE AND KARACHI ARE LEERY ABOUT THE PPP'S ATTITUDE
TOWARD THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND ARE DISSATISFIED WITH
THE ECONOMY. AND FINALLY, WHERE THE OPPOSITION IS
STRONG THERE SEEMS TO BE A POPULAR WISH FOR A CHANGE IN
GOVERNMENT. THESE FACTORS APPEAR TO INDICATE THAT THE
PNA HAS NOT CREATED THE CURRENT MOOD, BUT MAY BE IN A
POSITION TO CAPITALIZE ON IT.

14. THE PICTURE WILL BECOME CLEARER WITHIN THE NEXT
FORTNIGHT. AT PRESENT IT IS SAFE TO SAY PNA HAS PUT
PPP ON DEFENSIVE IN PUNJAB, BUT PPP CONTROLS APPARATUS
OF GOVERNMENT AND STILL COMMANDS RESPECTABLE SUPPORT
THROUGHOUT PAKISTAN. WHAT APPEARS EVIDENT NOW IS THAT
THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS PARTY CAN NO LONGER BE CERTAIN
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